EDITORIAL COMMENT

"Aren't we all over the map?" asked one of our editors as the Executive Board was selecting the articles for publication in this year's issue of CIRCLES. She was concerned that this issue of the journal lacked focus. The board members answered her concern with a resounding "Yes" -- and that's the way it should be! Women make up a very diverse group and are, indeed, "all over the map." Volume II of CIRCLES celebrates this diversity.

Almost a generation before, when American women began to organize on a broad front, Tammy Wynette's "Stand by Your Man" assumed the status of a protest song of rural white working class women. These women embraced the notion that loyalty to "your man" meant more than the unfolding of the "self." Yet, more and more women began to ask, "What does the liberation of these men mean to me?"

During that time period, uniting for our own liberation gave us a common ground. Yet, in a contemporary multicultural society, differences like race, class, and sexual orientation continue to claim women's allegiance to various other groups in the social spectrum. Diversity raises the issue of our identity as women. As we become clearer about our differences, we are at the same time confronting the question of what truly unites us. We at CIRCLES believe that the process of acknowledging and fostering our diversity does not require an abandonment of the common ground that the women's movement was built on.

Rather, it is crucial that women of all backgrounds foster coalitions based on respect for diversity. At the same time, these coalitions should be anchored in the vantage point of a sexed and gendered version of human rights. The idea of a "democratic subject" endowed with human rights was born only recently. While the term "human rights" has become a part of the international language, recent events remind us that women's rights continue to be denied worldwide. In Switzerland, women only first won the right to vote months ago, and in Yugoslavia, rape camps are situated in first-world territory.

How do we negotiate diversity in the face of adversity? We need to recognize each other as both belonging to the community of women, and as individuals in our own right. However, community as women is no longer simply a given derived from biology or shared social status. Instead, it hinges on a plurality that situates everyone at a nexus of interests. For only where there is an awareness of difference, of historically-grown boundaries, can there be a feeling of togetherness that goes beyond the volatile fuzziness of bonding. Let us not forget our specificity as women and renew our commitment to improving the lives of women throughout this nation and ultimately throughout the world.
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SPECIAL RECOGNITION

Thanks to Dean Boyer and the University at Buffalo School of Law Budget and Program Review Committee for their assistance.

Also, a special thanks to the CMP Foundation, Inc. for its generous support of our endeavor.

Finally, thanks to all those who submitted their work for our consideration.